BULLETIN No. 2
of the Roach Family Support Committee

WHY AN INQUEST IS NOT ENOUGH

The standard argument used by opponents of the R.F.S.C.'s call for an independent public inquirey is that an inquest *is* a public inquiry. For example, a certain Professor Vincent writes in *The Sun:* (16.2.83):

'The final decision will lie with the jury — twelve good men and true. If that is not a full and open inquiry, it is hard to know what is. The press will be there, the public will be there, and anyone will be able to give evidence.'

The Professor has not done his research. He is wrong on just about every point.

A coroner's jury does not consist of 'twelve good men and true'. It consists of between seven and eleven 'good and lawful men' chosen by the Coroner's Officer. The Coroner's Officer is a policeman.

The final decision does lie with the jury — in theory. But the jury is guided by the Coroner's summing up, by his definition of the available verdicts and his interpretation of the evidence. The family's solicitor will not be able to address the jury as she could in an ordinary court. In practice, if a coroner wants a particular verdict, he can usually make sure of getting it. The Helen Smith case, where the Coroner's improbable interpretation of the medical evidence failed to persuade the jury to return a misadventure verdict, was a very rare exception.

The inquest will not be a 'full' inquiry into the Roach case. It will be restricted to finding 'how, where and when' Colin came by his death. It will not inquire into the treatement of the Roach family after the death — unless the Coroner choses to admit it as evidence that the police had something to hide. It will certainly not inquire into the broader issue of police racism in Stoke Newington.

The Jury can say that Colin killed himself, or that he was 'unlawfully killed', or it can return an open verdict. If it finds that he was unlawfully killed, it cannot say who killed him — the police, or somebody elese. Even if, as in Winston Rose's case, the verdict is unlawful killing and it is perfectly obvious who was responsible, there is no guarantee that the person concerned will be prosecuted. That decision rests with the Director of Public Prosecution.

The inquest may appear to be an 'open' inquiry, but the report of the police investigation into his death will remain a secret. This gives the police lawyers a grossly unfair advantage. If any witness says anything inconsistent with what she or he told the police, this can be used in cross-examination to discredit the witness. But as the family's Solicitor cannot see the statements contained in the report, if police witnesses change their stories she will never know.

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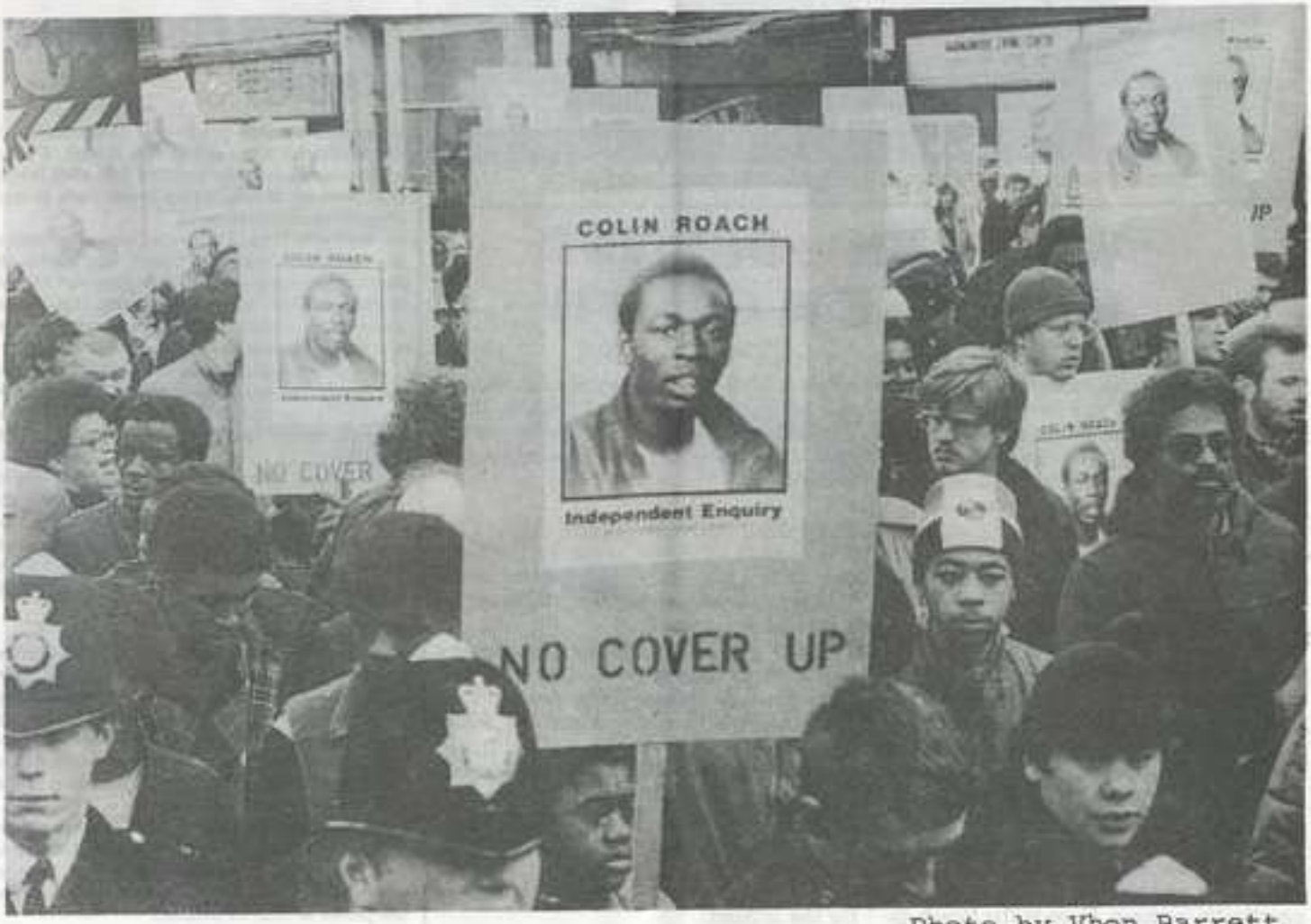

Photo by Vhon Barrett

COLIN ROACH LAID TO REST

The funeral service and burial of Colin Sylvester Roach (13th March 1961-12th January 1983) took place on Friday 18th February 1983. Over three hundred people packed into St. Barnabas parish church, Bethnal Green where the service was conducted by the Reverend Clive Young.

The prevailing atmosphere was one of deep anger and deep sorrow, and Rev. Young clearly realized this when he said, 'I see some who are angry and we need that right sort of anger at a time like this, which is determined to find out the truth to make things better.' Rev, Young donated his fee of £16.50 to the RFSC.

The sermon was read by Stan Emmanuel of Saxon Youth Club (Colin was a member of the Saxon Youth Club) and the hymns chosen by Colin's family for the service were, 'There is a Green Hill Far Away', 'The Lord's my Shepherd' and Amazing Grace.

Following the service, a motorcade of about seventy cars proceeded in a funeral cortege to the City of London Cemetry in Manor Park. Here admist, tears, anger and mournful elegiac singing Colin was finally laid to rest.

Mr and Mrs Roach with fellow mourners.

WHY AN INQUEST IS NOT ENOUGH

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The press will be there, right enough. After all the distrotions and downright lies they have trotted out so far, that is no guarantee that their readers will learn the truth. But after the press and the witnesses have been crammed into the tiny courtroom, there will not be much room left for the public.

And, yes, anyone will be able to give evidence — anyone, that is, who the Coroner chooses to call. The family have no right to call any witnesses of their own.

An inquest is not necessarily a cover-up. The inquest on Barry Prosser ('unlawfully killed' in Winson Green Prison) was not a cover-up; nor was that on Winston Rose; nor the one that found that Jim Heather-Hayes died through 'lack of care' in Ashford Remand Centre. Those were very satisfactory verdicts as far as they went; what was unsatisfactory was what happened afterwards, which in the Rose and Heather-Haynes cases was practically nothing. Even if the Roach inquest is as fair and thorough as an inquest can be under the present system, there will still be a need for a full public inquiry into all the circumstances surrounding Colin's death.

INQUEST POSTPONED

The inquest has been postponed to Monday 18th April. RFSC has called on the Coroner to transfer the inquest to Hackney Town Hall.

Since there is a great deal of concern and interest expressed locally, and it is clear that the chosen place would not be large enough to accomodate the many people from both Hachney and Tower Hamlets who have an interest in this particular case. We want the jury selected to reflect the local population both ethnically and in terms of males and females. Hackney Council has indicated its willingness to make the Town Hall available for the inquest.

HOME SECRETARY SAYS NO INQUIRY YET

On 3rd February RFSC wrote to the Home Secretary calling upon him to authorize an independent public inquiry and to respond to our letter within a month. On 2nd March we received the follwing reply:

'Thank you for you letter of 3 February to the Home Secretary, about the death of Mr. Colin Roach.

The Home Secretary fully shares the public sympathy for Mr. Roach's parents and family and the concern that the truth should be known about Colin's tragic death. He agrees that it is necessary to have a full, independent and public inquiry into the matter. But this is precisely what the inquest is intended to provide. As you will know, the inquest into Mr. Roach's death is due to resume on 18 April. It will be the occasion for a full examination of both the medical and the circumstantial cuases of death. The coroner, who is an independent judicial officer will sit with a jury and there will be a right for all interested parties to be represented.

The Home Secretary appreaciates that there is much anxiety and concern about Mr. Roach's death, especially in Hackney, but, while it is still the subject of a coroner's investigation, he does not think that it would be appropriate for him to consider establishing a separate enquiry into it or matters related to it.'

LETTER FROM MRS KNIGHT

My sympathy goes out to the Roach family on the death of their son Colin Roach. I am a mother and know the burning heartfelt feeling that goes on inside, losing loved ones in such suspicious circumstances.

We in the Knight Defence Campaign deplore the racist police and their activities within the black community. We have had enough of their brutal attacks and harassment. Only God knows how it pains my heart knowing that we are not recognised as children of God.

We have come a long way since they took our ancestors away from Africa and scattered us all over the world. But they will never get us back in chains again because we will fight to the end.

We must stand up, and fight together in brotherly love knowing the truth about Colin and others before him; the harassment and the brutality that black people in this society have to undergo. We have to stamp out such racist laws that uphold war upon us. By God's help, we will fight and win justice for all.

Mrs. Knellie Knight.

PS. Mrs. Knight and her family are themselves victims of the racism and violence which pervades Stoke Newington police. After being badly beaten up so badly by the police that she had to be hospitalised twice, Mrs. Knight and her daughter Jennifer were charged on six counts of 'actual bodily harm' and 'grevious bodily harm'.

After two trials, the tissue of lies concocted by Stoke Newington police could not stand up in Court. Mrs. Knight and Jennifer were acquitted of all the charges. Civil action against the police is now in process.

DROP THE CHARGES END POLICE INTIMIDATION AND MASS ARRESTS

The attitude of local Police Commander William Taylor and his bully boys is one of complete hostility. To them, peaceful marchers are seen as a threat to law and order.

In a public relations and press campaign, Commander Taylor has portrayed peaceful protesters as looters, rioters, thieves and perpetrators of violence against the police.

For example, after one march, the police issued a press release falsely claiming that marchers had looted a Jewellers shop At the time they issued their press release, they knew it was false.

The Sunday papers dutifully carried that false report. On the Monday, they then issued another release stating that marchers had nothing to do with the robbing of the Jewellers shop. Only the Daily Mirrorhas pointed this out to its reader.

West Indian Standing conference has rightly condemned police aggression and provocation. Hackney Black Peoples Association had denounced the police for baton charging youths, for provoking confrontation, for indiscriminate mass arrest and for targeting certain people for arrests.

In the case of Gabriel Noor, PC 1981 followed him everywhere he went before finally arresting him when the police attacked marchers on the Narrow Way in Mare Street. On the 12th February, the police attacked suddenly. In the Narrow Way, mass police reinforcements arrived. They scrambled out of their vans and started grabbing people and beating them. Some of the people arrested on the three occasions when there were mass arrests, were not taking part in the protest marches.

RFSC has written to Commander Taylor in the following terms:

"Since the tragic and bizarre death of Colin Sylvester Roach in the front foyer of Stoke-Newington Police Station on Wednesday 12th January, there have been four demonstrations of disbelief and outrage in relation to his death. These demonstrations took place, as you will recall, on 14th., 17th., 22nd. January and 12th February. Arising out of these demonstrations there has been a total of fifty eight arrests.

It was noticeable that on the occasion of each demonstration the police presence reached saturation proportions widely out of ratio with the number of demonstrators who have on each occasion observed the rules of peaceful, albeit vociferous, protest.

Your police force has during each of the four demonstrations (presumably for reasons best known to yourself and others in your hierarchy of command) over-reacted and unilaterally arrested people on the slightest pretext. Indeed on at least two occasions, 14th and 17th January, your police force actually disrupted and broke up the demonstrations quite gratuitously. This may or may not have been as a result of an opertional decision, but it nevertheless had the consequence of provoking the opportunity to initiate mass, almost indiscriminate arrests.

Whatever may be your views of your police force regarding the demonstrations which have taken place so far, the insensitivity, irresponsibility and violent actions displayed by your police forces since 12/1/83 cannot be condoned and are thoroughly unacceptable.

We should like to remind you that the police, ostensibly or otherwise, are PUBLIC SERVANTS and such actions and their continuance by your police force will bring no credit whatsoever either to you in your new command, or to Stoke-Newington Police whose notoriety is now indelibly inscribed in the folklore of many people in Hackney.

It is very clear to us that the fifty eight arrests which have taken place so far were unnecessary and would not have taken place had your officers not precipitated the situation. For example, following the end of the demonstrations of 22nd. January and 12th February, there was absolutely no need for your officers to remain in vast numbers in the very area where people were congregating prior to dispersing peacefully.

This can only be interpreted as a dramatic act of intimidation since it resulted on 22nd Janucry in many people being arrested and/or harassed as they made their way home and on 12th February people were not confident that they would be allowed to move away unmolested, given the experiences of previous demonstrations.

In the light of all this we feel that the very least you should do (and perhaps redeem yourself a little) is to authorize that all the charges which are being brought against the fifty eight demonstrators be withdrawn."

Most of the people arrested are appearing at Old Street Magistrates Court. The chances of anyone getting any kind of fair trial is incredibly slim. One of the Magistrates is on record in opposing bail even when the police have not objected to bail.

RFSC is picketing Old Street Magistrates Court on the following dates:

Wednesday March 16
Friday March 18
Tuesday March 22
Wednesday March 23
Thursday March 24

Your support is needed on these pickets

NO CONFIDENCE IN STOKE NEWINGTON POLICE

The call by RFSC for the breaking of all links with the police has gained widespread support. Hackney Council, Hackney NALGO, West Indian Standing conference, Hackney Council for Racial Equality, East London Workers Against Racism and Hackney Black Peoples Association are some of the organisations which have supported this call.

The local council passed a vote of no confidence in Stoke Newington Police. They are also considering withholding £4millions in rates paid to the police. Given legal and local political circumstances, the council is expected to collect the £4millions and refuse to hand it over until they are forced to do so by the courts.

Westindian Standing conference has rejected a call by local police Commander William Taylor for a familiarisation meeting. Standing Conference says that no purpose will be served by such a meeting.

Chairman William Trant denounced the local police for agression and provocation against marchers and protesters who have supported the Colin Roach campaign

Hachney NALGO has been at the forefront in supporting the demand for an independent inquiry. They have supported the campaign financially and by participating in the Marches and pickets. The Social Services department passed the following resolution.

This Departmental Meeting re-affirms the commitment of members in Social Services to the policy of the Branch in respect of the Colin Roach issue.

In particular, it resolves to refuse co-operation with all police officers and staff at every level of responsibility, except only in matters of life, limb, or personal liberty where it is likely that the welfare of individula clients would be seriously affected by such non-co-operation. Any contact with police which takes place shall include a verbal or written statement of Branch policy.

This meeting also calls upon the Branch, through its officers, to notify political and official individuals, as appropriate, of Branch policy, and to promote discussion with representatives of the black community as to appropriate further action.

KEEP THE FUNDS COMING IN

At the time of writing (3rd March), the total funds received by RFSC stood at £1,298.36. This includes donations from diverse organisations and collections at meetings. Expenditure at that date was £910.35.

With Home Secretary William Whitelaw's fudging on the demand for an independent inquiry, the campaign must go on. Therefore, RFSC appeals to supporters of the campaign for money to keep the campaign alive and vigorous and bouyant.

Black youths in Hackney have taken the initiative in organising a benefit for RFSC. A member of the Black Theatre Co-operative is also organising another benefit for RFSC. With fifty-eight arrests, the refusal of the police to drop the charges and the refusal of legal aid to some of the people arrested, money is needed for legal expenses.

So keep the funds rolling in. Send donations to:
The Treasurer
Roach Family Support Committee
50 Rectory Road
LONDON N16 7PP

Photo by Humphrey Nemar

BLACK THEATRE CO-OPERATIVE
ANNOUNCES A BENEFIT
FOR THE ROACH FAMILY SUPPORT COMMITTEE
WITH MEMBERS OF THE BLACK THEATRE CO-OPERATIVE AND GUESTS INCLUDING
SAKA EATI
BENJAMIN ZEPHANIA
SPARTACUS
INDIAN DANCERS
DATE: Sunday 17th April
VENUE: Half Moon Theatre, Mile End
Further Details: RFSC, Tel: 254 7480

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

The tragic and bizarre death of Colin Sylvester Roach on Wednesday night 12th January in Stoke Newington police station has had and continues to have reverberations which surprise almost everyone except Black men and women who know what it is to experience, life, work, struggle and death on the racist terrain of British society.

Racism defines British society as — between you and me — white society. This means that we are consequently excluded from the automatic realisation of our civil and political rights. We know that within the present racist and class structures of British society, the legal and political systems are increasingly failing to meet even the basic needs of the majority of people.

In our experience this means that, as Black people, we find ourselves trapped in these legal and political systems in terms of oppression and expelled from those very same systems when we want redress. This is what is happening now.

The fact of this resides in our historical experience. Experience structures or creates the knowledge, the insight, the understanding we have of our lives and struggles in British society: meetings, demonstrations and campaigns are facts of our experience. The basic historical fact is that in order to survive, we have had to resist and overcome forces which have acted against us. We have had to organise.

Therefore, when we began to learn that a young Black man — Colin Sylvester Roach — had been shot dead on the premises of Stoke Newington police station, so much horror, suspicion and outrage stirred within us that it was only a matter of time before we would take to the streets, demonstrate, organise and demand answers to the major question that needed asking:

WHAT HAPPENED TO COLIN ROACH IN STOKE NEWINGTON POLICE STATION?

We have been oppressed from time, and it is about time we begin to resist and resist again, and this is why our campaign for an independent public inquiry into the death and circumstances surrounding the death of Colin Roach will continue until we are satisfied.

After the New Cross Massacre: THIRTEEN DEAD NOTHING SAID, and the 1981 UPRISINGS there can be no turning back, the only way is forward.

SUPPORT C.A.R.L. MARCH

The Campaign Against Racist Laws has called a PROTEST MARCH on Sunday 27th March. The march focusess on the racist IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACTS and THE BREAK UP OF BLACK FAMILIES by the Government.

RFSC has decided to take a contingent on this March. We will be there with our banner and copies of RFSC Bulletin to give wider publicity to the demand for an INDEPENDENT INQUIRY into the death of Colin Roach. RFSC therefore urges all its supporters to join the RFSC contingent on the C.A.R.L. Protest March.

Time: 12 Noon Sunday 27th March
Assemble: Jubilee Gardens
County Hall
Waterloo
London SE1

Further info: Tel: 254-7480

PASCAL + SKEET PRESENT
A BENEFIT NIGHT
FOR THE COLIN ROACH FAMILY SUPPORT COMMITTEE
TO BE HELD AT DOWNSTOWN YOUTH CLUB,
DOWNS RD. E5.
ON FRIDAY THE 25th MARCH, 7-11.30
ROCKING TO
DANNY CASANOVA
ALSO LIVE ON STAGE
SIMPLICITY & BLACK SHADES (FEMALE SINGER)
BACKED BY
TELESTION RHYTHM SECTION
PETER RANKING & NIGGER COLGIE
REFRESHMENTS + ITAL FOOD ON SALE
ADMISSION: £1.50 AT DOOR, TICKETS IN ADVANCE £1.00
(TEL. 985 3459)
ALL PROCEEDS TO ROACH FAMILY SUPPORT COMMITTEE
BUSES: 106, 253, 55, 48, 38, 52, CLAPTON POND

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